

FWP's Connectivity Mapping Project

What is it? – A collaborative project to map important areas for wildlife connectivity in Montana.

When will it take place? – April through December 2010.

Why are we doing it? – The Connectivity piece of the Crucial Areas and Connectivity Assessment, with impetus from the Western Governors Association.

Who will do it? – FWP biologists and other species experts from throughout Montana will provide information to FWP data services staff to develop the layers.

How will it be done? – We will compile existing connectivity maps and data, and apply models where needed to map connectivity for selected species in Montana using best available science.

OVERVIEW

Fundamental Objective:

- Conserve habitat important to maintaining connectivity for vertebrate species in Montana

Project Objectives:

- Develop wildlife layers that identify wildlife corridors and linkages zones for selected focal species
- Rank linkages based on four pre-defined categories
- Develop management recommendations for proposed activities in all linkages
- Create comprehensive documentation of methods, data quality, assumptions and recommended future improvements for layers developed
- Integrate resulting connectivity layers into Montana Crucial Areas Planning System

Funding:

- Wildlife Conservation Society, Wildlife Conservation Opportunity Fund
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Connectivity Layer Development Process:

- Four primary groups will work on accomplishing the above objectives:
 - FWP Technical Advisory Committee: Provide guidance on overall strategic direction to ensure the layers, management recommendations and documentation meets the fundamental objective of the project.
 - Species/Connectivity Experts: Provide expertise on focal species' habitat and connectivity needs.
 - Agency Biologists: Assess focal species and habitat needs to identify areas meeting those characteristics. Provide additional information that will assist in ranking the linkage areas.
 - FWP Data Services Project Staff: Will work on data compilation, technical development, data review and produce project status reports.

- The objectives will be accomplished by following the tasks:
 - Early May to mid-June: prioritize the focal species list which was developed in 2009, compile existing data for those species, and determine the best approach for mapping their linkages.
 - Mid-June to mid-September: map core habitats for as many focal species as time will allow with the guidance of input and feedback from our external species experts and FWP biologists.
 - Once the core habitats are delineated for each species we will spend two months mapping the important linkages between them. Again we will rely on input and feedback from all of our experts throughout this process. We will complete this work in early November.
 - The final mapping step is to prioritize all linkages. To do this we will ask species experts to rank each linkage based on many factors including ecological importance and threats. This work will be completed by early December.
 - The final weeks of December will be spent preparing the layers for integration into the Montana Crucial Areas Planning System and finalizing documentation of our methodology. As a first version map of connectivity for Montana we feel it is also important to document the products' weaknesses and recommendations for future improvements.

